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Public Service Reforms and the Repositioning of Institutional Mandates: Strategic Implications for Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research Mission, 2015–2023

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Abstract

This paper examines how Nigeria's post-2015 public service reforms reshaped the institutional mandate and research mission of NITR between 2015 and 2023. While existing works on Nigerian public service reform have largely focused on ministries and service-delivery agencies, limited attention has been paid to how reform logic affect specialised research institutions whose outputs are long-term and knowledge-intensive. The study addresses this gap by interrogating the reform instruments such as fiscal controls, digital governance systems, and performance-based management reconfigured NITR's operational priorities and strategic orientation. The study adopts a qualitative historical and institutional approach, drawing on policy documents, official circulars, audit reports, in-depth interviews with senior officials from NITR, the Bureau of Public Service Reforms, the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, and the Federal Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology (FMIST), and a few secondary sources. The findings show that public service reforms compelled NITR to reposition its mandate from a predominantly research-driven institution to a development-oriented public agency, enhancing accountability and policy relevance while constraining scientific autonomy and long-term research capacity. The paper concludes that mandate repositioning at NITR represents a strategic leadership response to reform pressures, highlighting the need for reform frameworks that balance performance accountability with sustained scientific inquiry.

Keywords: *Public Service Reforms; mandate repositioning; Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research (NITR); strategic adaptation; scientific autonomy*

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Introduction

Across the globe, public service has been subjected to sustained waves of reform aimed at enhancing efficiency, accountability, and developmental impact in an era of fiscal constraint, technological disruption, and rising public expectations. Since the late 20th century, governments in both advanced and developing economies have increasingly questioned the effectiveness of traditional bureaucratic models, particularly in knowledge-driven sectors such as health, agriculture, and scientific research.[1] These reforms have not merely altered administrative procedures; they have fundamentally reshaped how public institutions define their mandates, measure performance, and justify their continued relevance within competitive policy environments. Research institutions, once insulated by claims of scientific autonomy, are now expected to show tangible socio-economic value, measurable outputs, and alignment with national development priorities.

In the Global South, and particularly in Africa, public service reform has unfolded within more complex structural conditions. Weak fiscal capacity, donor influence, fragile institutions, and postcolonial bureaucratic legacies have produced reform patterns that are often uneven, contested, and politically charged.[2] African research institutions have faced a dual pressure: on one hand, to maintain scientific credibility and long-term research capacity; on the other, to respond to reform regimes that prioritise short-term results, cost efficiency, and visible developmental outcomes.[3] This tension has been especially pronounced in public health and agricultural research bodies, whose work operates at the intersection of science, policy, and societal welfare. Consequently, institutional mandates across the region have been increasingly reframed, not always by legislative change, but through administrative reforms, funding conditionalities, and performance management regimes that subtly redefine what counts as "success."

Nigeria represents a particularly instructive case within this broader reform landscape. Since independence, successive Nigerian governments have pursued public service reforms as a means of addressing bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, and weak service delivery.[4] However, the reform wave inaugurated in 2015 marked a qualitative shift in both scope and intensity. Unlike earlier episodic or sector-specific reforms, the post-2015 reform agenda sought to institutionalise fiscal discipline, digital governance, merit-based human resource management, and performance accountability across the entire federal public service. Instruments such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA), Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS), performance management systems, and reinforced Public Service Rules collectively constituted a new governance environment that redefined operational autonomy and strategic discretion across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs).[5]

While the macro-level objectives of these reforms—transparency, accountability, and efficiency have been widely acknowledged, their institutional consequences have been uneven and under-examined, particularly within specialised research agencies. Existing

studies on Nigerian public Service reform have focused predominantly on ministries and service-delivery agencies, with limited attention to how reform logics affect research institutions whose outputs are inherently long-term, uncertain, and knowledge-intensive.[6] This gap is analytically significant because research institutes do not simply implement policy; they generate the knowledge upon which policy effectiveness often depends. When reform frameworks prioritise short-term performance metrics and administrative compliance, they risk reshaping research mandates in ways that may undermine scientific depth, institutional identity, and long-term capacity.

It is within this context that the Nigerian Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research (NITR) becomes a compelling case for analysis. Established originally as a specialised scientific body to combat human and animal trypanosomiasis, NITR historically operated under a technocratic research-oriented mandate that emphasised laboratory science, field surveillance, and epidemiological expertise. However, between 2015 and 2023, the Institute was increasingly compelled to reposition its mandate in response to federal public service reforms that emphasised development relevance, performance-based evaluation, and fiscal accountability. This repositioning did not occur through a formal amendment of NITR's enabling statute, but rather through administrative instruments, policy directives, and leadership expectations that progressively reframed the Institute's mission from a predominantly research-driven organisation to a development-oriented public agency. Despite the centrality of this transformation, existing studies have not sufficiently interrogated how mandate repositioning functions as a strategic response to reform pressure, nor how leadership mediates this process within bureaucratically constrained environments. Most analyses treat mandate expansion or mission drift as symptoms of institutional weakness, rather than as adaptive strategies employed by organisational leaders to ensure survival, legitimacy, and continued access to state resources. This paper addresses this gap by reframing mandate repositioning not as institutional decay, but as a form of strategic adaptation within a reform environment.

Analytically, the paper is grounded in an institutional–strategic theoretical perspective that views public organisations as actors operating within structured constraints, responding to reform pressures through adaptation, compliance, and selective reinterpretation of mandates.[7] Thus, leadership is conceptualised not merely as administrative authority, but as strategic agency exercised within reform-defined boundaries. From this perspective, NITR's post-2015 transformation reflects broader dynamics of institutional isomorphism, performance-driven governance, and strategic repositioning characteristic of contemporary public sector reform regimes. Against this background, this paper argues that the repositioning of NITR's institutional mandate between 2015 and 2023 represents a strategic leadership response to public sector reform pressures rather than a simple erosion of scientific purpose. By examining how reform instruments reshaped expectations, operational priorities, and leadership choices, the study contributes to leadership and strategic studies by illuminating how public sector leaders navigate reform-induced constraints while attempting to preserve institutional relevance. In doing so, it offers broader insights into the strategic dilemmas facing research

institutions in reforming states and the implications of mandate transformation for long-term scientific capacity and national development.

Conceptual Clarifications

Public Service Reforms

According to Christopher Hood, Public service reforms refer to deliberate, systematic changes in the structures, processes, and culture of public sector institutions with the aim of improving service delivery, accountability, and efficiency.[8] Reforms typically involve reorganisation of bureaucratic processes, adoption of new managerial tools, and integration of innovations such as information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance responsiveness.[9] In developing contexts such as Nigeria, reforms are often driven by the need to overcome legacies of colonial administration, bureaucratic inertia, and resource mismanagement. In this paper, public service reforms are understood as a series of institutional changes introduced in NITR between 2015 and 2024. These include staff development, administrative restructuring, ICT adoption, and alignment with national innovation policies, intended to reposition the institute for improved research output and service delivery.

Organisational Efficiency

Chester Barnard defines organisational efficiency as the extent to which an institution maximises outputs relative to its available inputs by reducing waste, streamlining processes, and achieving objectives with minimal resources.[10] In public research institutes, efficiency encompasses timely delivery of research outcomes, effective stakeholder engagement, and prudent utilisation of financial, human, and infrastructural resources.[11] Importantly, it is argued that efficiency in the public sector cannot be measured solely in profit terms, as in the private sector, but must be assessed in relation to public value, responsiveness to citizens' needs, and long-term sustainability.[12] Organisational efficiency in NITR is conceptualised as the institute's capacity to deliver high-quality research, diagnostic, and clinical services while overcoming systemic challenges such as underfunding, poor logistics, and administrative bottlenecks.

Institutional Evolution

Institutional evolution refers to the historical processes through which organisations change in structure, mandate, and operational culture in response to external pressures and internal adjustments.[13] For NITR, institutional evolution captures its transition from colonial-era foundations through post-independence adjustments, decades of stagnation, and recent reform attempts.[14] Understanding institutional evolution is important because it situates

current reform debates within a trajectory of inherited strengths and accumulated weaknesses, rather than treating them as sudden or unprecedented developments.

Bureaucratic Rigidity

Bureaucratic rigidity is characterised by strict adherence to formalised rules and hierarchical procedures, which, while intended to ensure accountability, often stifle innovation and adaptability.[15] In Nigeria's public service, such rigidity manifests in cumbersome procurement systems, rigid recruitment and promotion structures, and excessive political oversight.[16] Bureaucratic rigidity has historically hindered NITR's responsiveness to new scientific challenges, slowed decision-making, and limited the flexibility required for effective research management.

Public Value

The concept of public value, advanced by Mark H. Moore, emphasises that public institutions should not merely replicate private-sector models of efficiency but should be oriented toward creating outcomes that advance the collective good.[17] Public value entails legitimacy, operational capacity, and trust, as well as the production of socially relevant outcomes.[18] In the case of NITR, public value is expressed through healthier livestock populations, reduced incidence of trypanosomiasis, enhanced rural livelihoods, and contributions to national development. This paper sees public value as a normative benchmark against which reform efforts can be assessed.

Organisational Reform Outcomes

Organisational reform outcomes denote the tangible and intangible results of reform initiatives, ranging from improved productivity to strengthened accountability systems and enhanced service delivery.[19] In this paper, reform outcomes are measured not only by internal indicators such as improved research processes, leadership practices, and staff capacity, but also by external impacts on livestock health policies and rural development. The reason is that clarifying outcomes is necessary to differentiate between reform intentions and reform results, a distinction often blurred in public administration scholarship.

On the whole, these concepts form the central inquiry of the study: whether public service reforms undertaken within NITR have contributed to greater organisational efficiency, and to what extent persistent institutional challenges continue to hinder the realisation of its national mandate.

Overview of Nigerian Public Service Reforms

Public service reform in Nigeria between 2015 and 2023 marks a distinct phase in the country's long-standing efforts to restructure state institutions and enhance administrative effectiveness. While administrative reform has been a recurring feature of governance since independence, ranging from the 1970s Civil Service Reorganisation Programme to the structural adjustment-era reforms and post-2000 modernisation initiatives[20], the post-2015 period marked a more comprehensive and politically reinforced attempt at institutional transformation. Unlike earlier reforms, which were often episodic and unevenly implemented, this phase was characterised by a coordinated emphasis on accountability, efficiency, digital governance, and ethical discipline across MDAs. The reform agenda introduced after 2015 was explicitly a response to deep-seated governance deficits, including bureaucratic delays, fiscal leakages, weak coordination, and declining public confidence in state institutions. Public service reform was therefore elevated to a strategic national priority, closely linked to economic recovery, security, and development planning. It has been argued that the reform climate was deliberately designed to instil discipline, strengthen digital compliance, and reposition specialised agencies, especially research institutions, within a broader national development framework.[21] For parastatal research bodies such as NITR, this environment created both new obligations and strategic opportunities, compelling a recalibration of leadership practices, operational procedures, and institutional mandates.

A central policy anchor of this reform phase was the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), 2017–2020, which identified inefficiency in the public service as a structural constraint on national competitiveness. Although primarily conceived as a macro-economic stabilisation framework, the ERGP functioned simultaneously as a governance reform instrument that emphasised the professionalisation of the civil service, improved project execution, enhanced transparency, and stronger institutional capacity.[22] Its provisions underscored the interdependence between economic performance and bureaucratic effectiveness, signalling that development outcomes required not only fiscal prudence but also a capable and accountable public service. Within this framework, federal agencies, including research institutes, were expected to align strategic objectives, budgeting practices, and performance indicators with national development priorities.[23] Complementing the ERGP was the Federal Civil Service Strategy and Implementation Plan (FCSSIP), 2016–2019, developed by the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation (OHCSF). The FCSSIP constituted one of the most ambitious attempts to modernise Nigeria's bureaucracy since the Dotun Phillips reforms of the 1980s. An OHCSF official observed that unprecedented emphasis was placed on structured training, competency frameworks, and results-based appraisal mechanisms designed to shift the civil service from rule-bound administration toward performance-oriented practice.[24] By implication, it articulated a set of interrelated reform pillars, including competency-based human resource management, performance management systems, institutional culture change, and comprehensive digitalisation of administrative processes, geared towards efficiency.

Financial governance reforms formed another critical pillar of the post-2015 agenda. The full operationalisation of TSA fundamentally altered the management of public finances by centralising government revenues and strengthening expenditure control. While the TSA policy predated 2015, its rigorous enforcement during this period significantly curtailed revenue leakages, improved transparency, and enhanced fiscal discipline across MDAs. The policy also introduced close monitoring of government accounts, reducing opportunities for misappropriation and reinforcing public confidence in financial governance.[25] Similarly, the expansion of IPPIS targeted long-standing payroll distortions, including ghost workers and inflated personnelcosts[26], thereby improving personnel accountability and fiscal sustainability.

Digitalisation emerged as a defining feature of the reform era. The e-Government Master Plan, developed by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), provided the strategic blueprint for the digitisation of administrative processes across federal institutions. The plan promoted the automation of records, electronic correspondence, digital procurement systems, and integrated human resource platforms to reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks and enhance inter-agency coordination.[27] Digitalisation was not conceived merely as a technical upgrade but as a disciplinary tool to enforce compliance, improve professional conduct, and standardise administrative behaviour across research institutions.

The reform agenda also reinforced professionalism in public service appointments through stricter enforcement of the Public Service Rules (PSR) and scheme-of-service requirements by the OHCSF and the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC). Enhanced documentation standards, transparent recruitment procedures, clearer categorisation of misconduct, and strengthened disciplinary protocols were introduced to curb discretionary personnel practices. These measures significantly constrained informal administrative cultures and compelled agencies to standardise appointments, clarify job roles, and institutionalise merit-based progression.[28] For research institutions such as NITR, long affected by leadership instability and uneven staffing structures,[29] the reform environment exerted pressures on the alignment of its human-resource practices with emerging national standards. While these measures aimed to institutionalise meritocracy, their practical impact was limited by entrenched patronage networks, political interference, and systemic resistance within Nigeria's public service.

Fiscal pressures further intensified reform momentum. The 2016 economic recession, triggered by the collapse of global oil prices, exposed the unsustainability of rising personnel costs and administrative overheads. Official budget framework reports warned that inefficiencies within the public service were crowding out developmental expenditure, thereby strengthening the political imperative for reform.[30] In this context, austerity became both a constraint and a catalyst, compelling agencies to justify expenditures, improve efficiency, and explore collaborative partnerships in pursuit of their mandate and its realisation, and to justify their continuing existence in the result-oriented public service environment. Accountability mechanisms were also strengthened through enhanced oversight by institutions such as the Office of the Auditor-General of the Federation (OAuGF) and the Bureau of Public

Procurement (BPP). Audit reports and procurement reviews highlighted persistent irregularities in parastatals, prompting directives for improved internal controls and stricter compliance.[31] Nevertheless, it has been observed that a persistent gap between formal compliance and practical implementation exists.[32] This shows the longstanding challenges of institutional fragmentation, uneven enforcement, and political-administrative capture in the reform history of the Nigerian Public Service.

Importantly, the reform period was shaped by a broader ideological shift toward performance-driven governance. Official communications from the OHCSF repeatedly emphasised the need for a results-oriented, innovative, and citizen-focused public service.[33] This orientation influenced strategic planning, performance monitoring, and new managerial practices across MDAs, including research institutions. Both FMIST and OHCSF staff underscored that the reforms were conceived as mutually reinforcing—digitalisation to enhance transparency, competency frameworks to professionalise the workforce, and disciplinary systems to restore public confidence.[34] It is within this reform context that the institutional repositioning of NITR's mandate and its implications for the institute's research mission in the study period can be grasped and analysed.

NITR's Pre-Reform Mandate and Orientation

NITR emerged from the colonial state's veterinary and medical research infrastructure, established to manage trypanosomiasis as a constraint on livestock production, human settlement, and labour mobility in Northern Nigeria.[35] From the early 20th century, British colonial administrators regarded animal trypanosomiasis primarily as an economic problem rather than a public health concern, given its impact on cattle rearing, transport animals, and agricultural expansion within the protectorate. Consequently, trypanosomiasis research was institutionalised through veterinary laboratories, mobile field units, and experimental stations attached to the colonial Veterinary Department rather than through indigenous public health institutions.[36] Colonial research practice privileged epidemiological surveillance, vector mapping, and chemotherapeutic experimentation, all geared toward safeguarding colonial economic interests. These activities were characterised by hierarchical control, expatriate scientific leadership, and limited investment in local scientific capacity. As a result, trypanosomiasis research evolved as a technocratic, externally oriented enterprise, largely disconnected from indigenous health systems or long-term institutional development.[37] This colonial epistemic orientation would profoundly shape the organisational culture and strategic posture of post-independence trypanosomiasis research institutions in Nigeria.

At independence, the federal government embarked on a process of converting colonial research units into national scientific institutions capable of supporting development planning and state-building. This transition culminated in the formal establishment of NITR under the NITR Act, which reconstituted the Institute as a federal parastatal with a nationwide mandate.[38] The Act significantly expanded the Institute's remit, authorising it to conduct

research into both human and animal trypanosomiasis, advise government on disease prevention and control strategies, and collaborate with national and international bodies in the pursuit of scientific advancement and public welfare.[39] This statutory reconstitution marked a critical postcolonial departure from colonial research logic. For the first time, trypanosomiasis research was embedded within Nigeria's sovereign administrative framework and linked formally to national development objectives. But while the legal mandate expanded, institutional practices and organisational culture continued to reflect colonial legacies, particularly in the privileging of scientific autonomy, technocratic leadership, and laboratory-centred research.[40]

Before the post-2015 reform era, NITR's institutional mandate was interpreted predominantly through a scientific–technical lens. The Institute's core responsibility was defined as the generation of scientific knowledge on trypanosomes, vectors, diagnostic methods, and disease ecology. Research activities focused on laboratory experimentation, entomological surveys, and periodic field surveillance in endemic zones, particularly across Northern and Middle Belt (North-Central) Nigeria.[41] Official annual reports of NITR from the 1980s through the early 2000s reveal an institutional emphasis on research continuity rather than developmental outcomes.[42] Thus, success indicators were understood in terms of the number of samples analysed, surveys conducted, technical reports produced, and workshops organised. There was limited institutional emphasis on measuring impact in terms of reduced disease prevalence, improved livestock productivity, or sustained public health outcomes.[43] This orientation reflected the broader post-independence research policy environment in Nigeria, where scientific institutes were often insulated from performance-based accountability and evaluated primarily on their technical outputs rather than social impact. As a result, NITR's mandate was largely understood internally as a knowledge-production function rather than a service-delivery or development-oriented responsibility. Engagement with policymakers, local governments, and rural communities was largely advisory and episodic, reinforcing the Institute's identity as a specialist research enclave.[44]

A defining feature of NITR's pre-reform orientation was its high degree of research autonomy, backed by a technocratic leadership culture dominated by senior scientists. Leadership legitimacy was derived primarily from academic qualifications, length of service, and professional standing within the scientific community. Directors-General and departmental heads were typically appointed from within the Institute or related research establishments, reflecting a preference for scientific continuity over managerial innovation.[45] This leadership model led to strong internal cohesion and protected scientific independence, but also insulated the Institute from broader public service governance reforms. Administrative oversight focused on procedural compliance with civil service rules rather than strategic planning, performance management, or institutional adaptability.

In an interview, a Deputy Director of NITR notes that managerial training, strategic foresight, and stakeholder engagement were not prioritised in leadership development before 2015.[46] This technocratic autonomy mirrored a wider pattern within Nigeria's parastatal research

sector, where scientific institutes operated at arm's length from core policy processes. It is instructive to note that while this arrangement shielded research agendas from political interference, it also limited institutional responsiveness to changing development priorities and governance expectations.[47]

Operationally, NITR's activities before 2015 were dominated by a laboratory–field surveillance logic inherited from both colonial veterinary practice and early post-independence research traditions. The Institute's laboratories, diagnostic units, and field stations constituted the primary sites of institutional legitimacy and resource allocation. Scientific authority was grounded in laboratory expertise and entomological fieldwork rather than in policy influence or development outcomes. Official records indicate that field operations were often project-based and constrained by irregular funding releases, limiting sustained intervention in endemic communities.[48] Surveillance activities generated valuable epidemiological data, yet these data were not consistently integrated into national livestock or public health strategies. Hence, coordination with state governments and agricultural extension services was weak, reinforcing the separation between scientific knowledge production and policy implementation.[49] This operational logic ascertained NITR's identity as a research-focused institution rather than a development actor, contributing to its marginal positioning within national planning frameworks.

Another critical characteristic of NITR's pre-reform orientation was the absence of systematic performance-based accountability mechanisms. Leadership appraisal, departmental evaluation, and staff assessment were governed largely by seniority-based civil service procedures rather than measurable outputs or impact indicators. Annual reporting focused on activities undertaken rather than outcomes achieved, and budgetary allocations were rarely tied to demonstrable performance.[50] Beyond any reasonable doubt, this environment enabled inefficiencies to persist and discouraged innovation. While formal rules existed under the Public Service Rules, enforcement was uneven, and accountability mechanisms were weakly institutionalised.[51] This shows broader structural challenges within Nigeria's public service, where research institutions often operated outside the main thrust of reform initiatives affecting mainstream ministries.

These realities defined NITR's pre-reform posture as one of guarded autonomy, scientific conservatism, and limited external engagement. The Institute served as a specialised knowledge-producing organisation, insulated from short-term political pressures but also marginal to core policy processes. While this autonomy protected scientific integrity, it simultaneously rendered NITR structurally vulnerable to later reform shocks. By 2015, for example, NITR possessed considerable technical expertise but lacked the strategic capacity to articulate its relevance within Nigeria's evolving governance and development discourse.[52] Its mandate, though legally broad, was operationally narrow; its leadership culture, though scientifically credible, was administratively conservative; and its accountability systems were insufficiently aligned with emerging public sector norms. This institutional condition provides the critical baseline for understanding why post-2015 public

service reforms precipitated a significant repositioning of NITR's mandate, leadership structures, and operational priorities. It is against this historical background that the Institute's post-2015 adaptation requires an analysis, not as an isolated administrative adjustment, but as a response to long-standing structural tensions between scientific autonomy and public sector governance.

Public Sector Reform and Mandate Repositioning at NITR, 2015–2023

The transformation of NITR between 2015 and 2023 must be understood within the broader context of federal public service reforms aimed at enhancing fiscal discipline, administrative efficiency, and service delivery. These reforms, driven by the Presidency, the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation (OHCSF), the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (OSGF), and the FMIST, established a comprehensive regulatory framework that reshaped expectations for research institutions.[53] Consequently, NITR's operational landscape was progressively redefined through strengthened accountability, standardised reporting, human-resource rationalisation, and performance-oriented mandates. A staff member of the Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR) posits that this reform agenda sought to eliminate discretionary practices, enforce consistent standards, and instil measurable administrative discipline across MDAs.[54] This indicates a deliberate strategy to professionalise governance and align institutional operations with national development objectives.

A primary driver of post-2015 reform was the Federal Government's emphasis on economic stabilisation and the rationalisation of public expenditures in response to the economic recession of 2015.[55] Presidential directives mandated fiscal discipline across MDAs, requiring the adoption of cost-saving measures and the elimination of redundant practices.[56] For NITR, this translated into compulsory compliance with the TSA, which centralised all federal revenues and expenditures under the Office of the Accountant-General of the Federation. This measure significantly curtailed discretionary use of internally generated funds and imposed stricter reporting obligations on all categories of expenditure. The TSA was introduced to "eliminate leakages and force MDAs to operate within verifiable financial frameworks to institutionalise a culture of fiscal discipline across federal agencies.''[57] Centralised treasury controls meant that NITR could no longer allocate resources independently, and routine operational spending, procurement, and project disbursements became subject to multi-level scrutiny.[58] While these measures enhanced transparency and financial accountability, they also introduced bureaucratic rigidities that constrained the Institute's ability to respond promptly to urgent research and field operational needs.

Complementing fiscal reforms, the national anti-corruption agenda intensified oversight of procurement processes across MDAs, including NITR. Under the Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), the Institute was required to adhere to stricter compliance protocols for the acquisition of research equipment, laboratory upgrades, and field operations.[59] The resulting increase in

documentation and multi-level approval requirements often delayed operational workflows, particularly field-based trypanosomiasis surveillance missions that previously relied on flexible expenditure procedures. Critical activities such as trap installation, vector monitoring, and field sample collection were subjected to extended processing times due to mandatory vetting and compliance checks embedded within the reformed financial framework.[60] This bureaucratisation, while reinforcing transparency and accountability, slowed scientific response and introduced risks to data quality and timeliness, especially in ecologically sensitive or seasonally constrained research zones.[61] A BPSR procurement specialist observed that this period was characterised by "strict BPP compliance demands even for technical research procurements, which inevitably slowed operational responsiveness."[62]

A further major driver of reform was the Federal Government's commitment to public sector digitalisation, particularly through the deployment of IPPIS and the enforcement of e-government standards across MDAs. IPPIS was introduced to eliminate payroll fraud, ensure biometric verification of staff, and standardise human resource management within federal institutions.[63] NITR's integration into the IPPIS platform fundamentally restructured its personnel administration by transferring the management of staff records, payroll, and employment processes from internal control to centralised federal oversight. Core human-resource functions, including postings, promotions, salary adjustments, and retirement procedures, were subjected to electronic validation and continuous monitoring.[64] This development tremendously curtailed the discretionary authority historically exercised by institutional administrators. While this centralisation enhanced payroll integrity and reduced opportunities for informal manipulation, it simultaneously constrained NITR's flexibility in responding to specialised staffing needs within its research units.[65]

In addition to IPPIS, circulars issued by the OHCSF mandated the adoption of e-government practices, requiring agencies to migrate from paper-based administration to digital records management and electronic correspondence. NITR's administrative departments, particularly human resources and research coordination, were consequently compelled to upgrade documentation systems and workflow processes.[66] This reform introduced additional implementation hurdles for field stations in Kaduna, Vom, Kano, and Niger, where the shift to digital systems was further constrained by unreliable and inconsistent internet connectivity.[67] An OHCSF digital-records specialist described this shift as essential to "creating a traceable, technology-supported administrative workflow," although the official acknowledged the uneven capacity of MDAs to adapt to the reform.[68] For instance, while these reforms promised long-term efficiency, transparency, and traceability, their implementation was impeded by infrastructural deficits, erratic power supply, and uneven ICT capacity, which generated short-term bottlenecks in administrative operations and constrained the full realisation of digital governance objectives.

As a parastatal research institute under the supervisory authority of FMIST, NITR was significantly shaped by sector-specific reform directives that reoriented research governance toward performance and innovation. Ministerial circulars introduced performance-based

evaluation frameworks that linked budgetary allocations and institutional appraisal to measurable outputs, including peer-reviewed publications, patents, technological innovations, and demonstrable field interventions.[69] This marked a decisive departure from earlier assessment regimes that prioritised procedural compliance over substantive research impact. Under the leadership of Dr Ogbonnaya Onu, the Ministry pursued an innovation-led reform agenda that required research agencies to align scientific outputs with National Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) priorities, privileging applied research, outcome measurability, and policy relevance.[70]

In parallel, the Ministry enforced alignment with the National STI Roadmap (2017–2030), which sought to reposition Nigeria's research ecosystem in support of economic diversification, food security, and national development objectives.[71] Within this policy framework, NITR was required to demonstrate the developmental relevance of its work on vector control, livestock productivity, and human African trypanosomiasis through structured performance scorecards, documented community impact, and evidence of collaboration with universities, agricultural agencies, and international research partners.[72] These requirements prompted strategic adjustments in NITR's research agenda, including increased emphasis on applied outcomes, translational research, and inter-institutional collaboration, thereby embedding development-oriented performance logic within the Institute's scientific mandate.

The renewed implementation of the Steve Oronsaye Report on public sector restructuring between 2021 and 2023 introduced an additional layer of policy uncertainty within Nigeria's administrative landscape. Recommendations advocating the merger, rationalisation, or abolition of selected MDAs compelled research institutions, including NITR, to proactively defend their institutional relevance and statutory indispensability.[73] In response to directives from the OSGF, affected agencies were required to submit updated organisational profiles, clarify their legal mandates, and demonstrate unique national value. For NITR, this process necessitated a strategic articulation of its central role in addressing trypanosomiasis, an endemic disease with significant implications for human health, livestock productivity, rural livelihoods, and national food security.[74] This deliberate effort reinforced the developmental and strategic relevance of its research mission within the broader public sector architecture.

Concurrently, the rationalisation agenda intensified scrutiny of leadership structures across federal agencies through stricter enforcement of tenure regulations. Circulars issued by the OSGF and the OHCSF reaffirmed adherence to the four-year renewable tenure framework for chief executives of MDAs, with the explicit objective of reducing politicisation and enhancing institutional stability.[75] At NITR, compliance with these directives shaped the timing and sequencing of leadership transitions in the office of the Director-General, ensuring that appointments, acting capacities, and handover processes conformed to established administrative rules rather than discretionary political intervention. An OHCSF official interviewed revealed that tenure enforcement was intended to "end arbitrary extensions and stabilise leadership cycles."[76] The policy outcome strengthened administrative continuity and created a more predictable governance environment conducive to long-term research

planning and project implementation. From the foregoing, it is safe to argue that these reforms not only recalibrated the structural and administrative landscape of NITR but also set the stage for tangible operational and strategic consequences, which are explored in the next section.

Implications for NITR's Research Mission

The policy and procedural adjustments introduced between 2015 and 2023 reshaped NITR's mandate, operational routines, and leadership practices, compelling the Institute to reconcile its research mission with emerging national priorities and compliance demands. As the Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR) renewed emphasis on rationalisation, accountability, and result-oriented governance, research institutes previously defined mainly by scientific inquiry found themselves compelled to realign their mission and operational practices to meet evolving expectations of public value, transparency, and socio-economic relevance.[77] According to a senior officer at the BPSR, the wider reform agenda repositioned federal research institutes such as NITR to "demonstrate clear national value, justify public expenditure, and operate with greater accountability."[78] This insider assessment furthers the idea that reforms were designed not merely as administrative exercises but as mechanisms to ensure that public institutions contribute directly to development outcomes.

Before the reform impetus, NITR's mandate centred on the scientific study of trypanosomiasis and related vector-borne diseases, combining medical, veterinary, and entomological research. The Institute operated largely on a research-oriented model: generating data, conducting laboratory and field studies, and occasionally advising the government on control measures. However, the national reform framework introduced in 2015 established a new criterion for public agencies: they must demonstrate clear relevance to national development goals, measurable impact, and fiscal accountability.[79]

For NITR, this meant a shift from purely academic or technical research to a broader developmental mission. Its mandate expanded to include not only disease research but also active contributions to public health outcomes, livestock productivity, rural development, and sustainable disease control strategies across ecological zones. In effect, NITR was re-imagined as a public health and development agency, not just a research institute.[80] This redefinition aligned with reformers' objectives of rationalising parastatals, retaining agencies whose functions are essential for national welfare, and discarding or merging redundant ones.[81] This recalibration of mandate shows a broader shift in how public research institutions are expected to operate: no longer as isolated scientific enclaves, but as integrated components of national development architecture. In NITR's case, it also meant greater justification of each project in terms of social and economic value, community impact, and policy relevance.[82] In an interview, the Director-General of NITR explained that the reform period compelled the Institute to "move beyond core trypanosomiasis research and demonstrate measurable benefits to livestock productivity, rural development, and public

health systems."[83] This internal recognition supports the notion that NITR's mandate broadened in response to federal expectations under the reform agenda.

Accompanying this mandate revision was a wave of operational restructuring. As part of its coordinating role, BPSR developed practical guidelines for managing and reforming agencies and parastatals, including research institutes, covering governance, procurement, financial management, and service delivery.[84] Under these guidelines, NITR was required to reassess its internal units and departments. Units previously justified on narrow scientific grounds were reviewed for relevance and output potential. Where performance was weak, or overlap with other agencies existed, departments risked being downsized, merged, or repurposed. The Director of the Human African Trypanosomiasis Research Department (HATRD) confirmed that several departmental reviews were undertaken during this period, noting that "HATRD itself was restructured to align with STI priorities, particularly in diagnostics, surveillance, and community disease control."[85] This illustrates how reforms translated into concrete functional shifts within NITR's internal departments. For instance, veterinary, entomology, and field-station units had to justify their operations not only in scientific terms, but also in relation to national livestock or public-health strategies.[86]

Moreover, resource allocation and budgetary planning became tightly regulated. Funding proposals had to align with output-oriented results and be defensible under fiscal scrutiny. Under the reform regime's broader financial governance changes, such as the adoption of the TSA and stricter procurement controls, internal resource flows at NITR became more transparent and subject to multi-level approval.[87] While these measures improved accountability and reduced waste, they also introduced operational constraints. Urgent field missions, rapid procurement of reagents, or quick mobilisation for vector-control interventions now had to navigate bureaucratic procedures, compliance processes, and centralised oversight. The new reality has delayed response time, reduced flexibility, and undermined the Institute's capacity to adapt swiftly to emergent disease threats.[88] A senior Director at the FMIST acknowledged that while policies such as TSA and IPPIS strengthened transparency, "they also slowed down operational flexibility for scientific agencies, especially where urgent procurement or field mobilisation was required."[89] This shows that NITR's operational delays were part of a broader systemic challenge across MDAs.

The reform agenda further institutionalised performance management across parastatals. Agencies, including research bodies, were required to produce results aligned with national priorities, develop annual work plans, and report on measurable outcomes.[90] For NITR, this meant that leadership and departmental units were evaluated not simply on administrative compliance or continuity, but on output metrics: number of field surveys, vector-surveillance missions, diagnostic services provided, community outreach programmes, research publications, collaborations, and contributions to national livestock and public-health policies.[91] This performance-oriented model re-defined success: from internal scientific milestones to external societal impact. An officer from the OHCSF noted that performance management reforms were introduced "to ensure that agencies like NITR focused less on

administrative routines and more on measurable service delivery outcomes."[92] This aligns NITR's internal reforms with broader civil service transformation goals.

It is instructive to note that the reforms encouraged stronger partnerships with universities and international bodies. One Director remarked that "collaborations expanded because the reform era required us to demonstrate relevance through joint research, training, and postgraduate linkages."[93] This shows the extent of external engagement as an operational shift in NITR during the reform period. Although NITR serves primarily within Nigeria's domestic research landscape, its operations are embedded in a broader global health governance framework shaped by international trypanosomiasis elimination initiatives. Programmes led by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) exerted external pressures that reinforced demands for data transparency, standardised diagnostic protocols, and structured collaboration with regional and international partners.[94] These global expectations converged with domestic public sector reforms that emphasised accountability, performance measurement, and evidence-based reporting. Consequently, NITR progressively aligned its research operations with internationally recognised surveillance and vector-control standards, enhancing the comparability of its data, strengthening its scientific credibility, and embedding more rigorous quality-assurance and reporting practices within its institutional processes.[95]

However, compliance with these global standards also generated additional administrative and managerial burdens. The requirement for detailed documentation, regular compliance reporting, and coordination with multiple domestic and international stakeholders expanded the workload of both management and research personnel. Also, international reporting obligations effectively forced the Institute to harmonise its data systems and adopt stricter quality-assurance protocols."[96] This underscores how global health governance mechanisms simultaneously strengthened institutional discipline while intensifying operational demands. Such accountability mechanisms offer important benefits. They reinforce transparency, justify public expenditure, and provide evidence of institutional relevance. Additionally, they created scope for strategic planning: by aligning activities with national health and development agendas, NITR could potentially secure funding, influence policy, and embed itself as a critical actor in disease control and rural development.[97] However, this shift also generates tension. The demand for short-term, measurable outputs has discouraged long-term fundamental research, basic science, or exploratory studies whose outcomes are uncertain or accrue over long horizons. The pressure to deliver visible, quantifiable results has also created a bias toward low-risk, high-visibility projects, at the expense of foundational studies whose ultimate benefit may be diffuse or long-term.[98] A Senior Research Scientist at NITR observed that the reforms "created pressure to produce quick results, which sometimes affected the depth of long-term scientific studies."[99] This provides internal evidence of how performance-driven reforms shaped scientific practice at NITR.

The reform-driven re-orientation of NITR's mission and operations raises complex questions about institutional sustainability, capacity-building, and identity. On one hand, aligning with

national development priorities and adopting accountability mechanisms enhances NITR's prospects for funding, legitimacy, policy influence, and stakeholder engagement.[100] The Institute may become more central to public health, livestock development, and rural transformation agendas. On the other hand, an expanded mandate and increased operational demands risk over-stretching institutional capacity. Staff and management must balance scientific research, field operations, community engagement, reporting, and compliance. This "dual accountability" to scientific standards and public-service performance criteria may stretch human resources, reduce flexibility, and increase workload. In some cases, the core scientific mission may be compromised or diluted under competing demands for social impact and administrative output.[101] Moreover, reliance on project-based, outcome-driven funding has shifted NITR's orientation away from long-term research toward short-term projects, often influenced by donor or policy cycles. This has undermined continuity, institutional memory, and the capacity to undertake ambitious, high-risk, high-reward science, critical for tackling complex problems like vector ecology, drug resistance, or emerging pathogens.[102]

The redefinition of mandate and operational realignment under the reform agenda places NITR at a crossroads: between becoming a fully integrated development actor and preserving its identity as a scientific research institute. Navigating this paradox requires adaptive governance, strategic leadership, and institutional reflexivity. First, there is a need for a hybrid governance model, one that preserves scientific autonomy, supports long-term research, and accommodates flexibility, but also ensures accountability, transparency, and alignment with national priorities. This may involve establishing a dual governance track: one for scientific research (guided by scientific committees, peer review, long-term strategy) and another for development-oriented operations (guided by performance targets, stakeholder engagement, outreach, policy advisory). In this regard, the DG stated that the reform environment enabled "gradual modernisation of our diagnostic laboratories, particularly in molecular testing and vector surveillance capacity.[103] This shows how operational investments were linked to reform demands for institutional relevance.

Second, strengthening institutional capacity and human resources is essential. Staff must be equipped not only for scientific research but also for project management, monitoring and evaluation, stakeholder communication, and policy engagement. Leadership training, capacity building, and institutional support for multi-disciplinary engagement become critical. A Director at FMIST revealed that agencies under the Ministry were encouraged to "upgrade their digital presence, redesign websites, and adopt online platforms for service delivery and public communication."[104] Consistent with this directive, NITR revamped its digital communication tools during the reform period. Finally, robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks have to be institutionalised, not only to track results, but to assess how reforms affect research quality, institutional resilience, and long-term scientific capacity. Such frameworks can help identify unintended consequences of reform (e.g. mission drift, staff burnout, quality trade-offs) and guide corrective strategies.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that Nigeria's post-2015 public service reforms fundamentally reshaped the institutional mandate and research mission of NITR. The analysis reveals that the Institute's transformation between 2015 and 2023 occurred not through formal legislative amendment but through administrative instruments, performance frameworks, and reform-driven governance expectations that progressively redefined institutional purpose and operational priorities. Reform mechanisms such as the TSA, PPIS, performance management systems, and alignment with national science and technology policies curtailed managerial discretion while simultaneously compelling research institutions to demonstrate measurable developmental relevance, fiscal discipline, and public accountability. The study advances the argument that NITR's mandate repositioning represents a form of strategic adaptation rather than institutional erosion. In the face of rationalisation pressures, intensified oversight, and performance-oriented governance, institutional leadership actively reinterpreted the Institute's mandate to align scientific research with public health outcomes, livestock productivity, and rural development objectives. While this adaptive strategy enhanced institutional legitimacy, policy relevance, and survival within a reforming state apparatus, it also generated enduring tensions between long-term scientific inquiry and short-term, output-driven performance imperatives.

Its focus on a specialised research institute broadens the empirical and analytical scope of Nigerian public service reform discourse, which has largely concentrated on ministries and service-delivery agencies. The findings also contribute to leadership and strategic studies by conceptualising mandate repositioning as a leadership-mediated response to bureaucratic constraint rather than as mission drift. The NITR case, thus, presents wider insights into the governance challenges facing public research institutions in reforming states and underscores the need for reform frameworks that balance accountability with scientific autonomy to sustain institutional resilience and long-term knowledge production.

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